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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 002366

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: GHANA IS PREPARED FOR LARGELY FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The stage is set for a substantially free, fair, and peaceful election on December 7. All political parties have publicly and privately committed themselves to promoting transparent and violence-free elections. Although the Electoral Commission has not managed its budget well, they seem on track with distributing ballot papers and other materials necessary for Election Day. Ghanaians have benefitted from lively discussion and debate on television and radio, in workshops and debates. On November 17, Ghana saw its second-ever presidential debate. Although the ruling party was absent, the opposition parties discussed a wide variety of topics. The volatile Northern region has remained generally calm. Ghana's security agencies also seem well-organized and mobilized to monitor events on Election Day. End summary.

LIVELY DEBATE

12. (U) Campaign 2004 has been marked by lively discussion and debate. Parliamentary candidates have participated in local debates throughout the country. Television and radio shows have saturated Ghanaians with call-ins and programs about the election. PAS has sponsored a series of party discussions on different election topics. On November 17, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) hosted Ghana's second-ever presidential debate in front of a national television and radio audience.

13. (U) The debate included National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate John Atta Mills, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP)'s George Aggudey, and People's National Convention (PNC) flag bearer Edward Mahama. (The NPP did not participate). Questions focused on the economy, good governance, and social sector issues.

14. (U) The economy: Mahama said the PNC would take Ghana out of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program, boost educational and agricultural subsidies, lower fuel prices, and improve the efficiency of public sector enterprises. Aggudey of the CPP argued that Ghana should stop "begging" and improve self-sufficiency. Atta Mills of the NDC conceded that "we can't wish away Bretton Woods institutions" but argued Ghana should seek more leverage in the implementation of IFI programs. Ghana would have to increase fuel prices because of world price hikes, he said, although he hoped the rise could be moderated by cuts in fuel taxes. He argued for greater diversification of exports and industries and lower interest rates.

15. (U) Good Governance: All participants said they would fight corruption. Mahama said the PNC would enact a conflict of interest law and separate the portfolios of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice. He would protect whistle blowers and improve the work environment for judges. Aggudey (CPP) thought Ghana had sufficient institutions to crack down on corruption (although they need strengthening). He would reinstate the criminal libel law because of abuses by the media. Atta Mills acknowledged the NPP had done some good work and the NDC would build on this, not scrap everything which came before it.

16. (U) Social Sector: the PNC and CPP candidates argued for free education for all. Atta Mills (NDC) supported free primary education for all and improvements to polytechnical institutions, stressing the NDC's commitment to "social democracy". The PNC candidate highlighted the need to improve health care and health insurance. The NDC candidate said jobs and youth programs were a priority. Aggudey of the CPP made headlines by noting the need to bring more women into government to "bring comfort" to his administration. All the participants were cautious about the pending domestic violence bill, favoring traditional ways of handling marital rape and domestic violence. The PNC and CPP candidates called for prosecuting the killers of the Ya Na (the Dagbon Chief murdered in 2002 in Yendi, Northern Region).

GENERALLY CALM IN THE NORTH

17. (U) The political atmosphere in the Northern Region, the region considered most likely to encounter election-related violence in the lead-up to December 7, has remained calm. The regional authority recently lifted a ban on public rallies and call-in radio programs (Note: Although not legally binding, the "ban" was essentially a warning to radio stations not to encourage inflammatory rhetoric on their programs; the "lifting" was a signal that the government and media were working together. End note). President Kufuor, Vice President Mahama, and NDC leaders Atta Mills and JJ Rawlings have all visited and addressed public rallies in the Northern Region over the past few weeks.

18. (SBU) While addressing supporters in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region, President Kufuor announced that the government supports a burial for the Ya-Na early after the elections (Note: the Ya-Na has yet to be buried because the Andanis and Abudus, the "gates" of the Dagbon tribe, disagree about who should take over the chieftancy. End note). He also paid an unexpected stop in Yendi, which helped calm the atmosphere in the area. The parties appear to recognize the importance of peaceful elections and are exercising restraint. Active outreach by civil society and security personnel to encourage peace has also been effective.

19. (U) There were only two security incidents over the past week. On November 28, two people sustained gunshot wounds during a rally featuring Rawlings and NDC vice presidential candidate Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni in Tamale. It is not clear who fired the weapon. The incident in Tamale followed an incident, also involving Rawling's convoy earlier in the week in Bongo, Upper East region. Mr. Clement Apikiya, the District Chief Executive (DCE) of Bongo (near the regional capital of Bolgatanga), reported a case of assault by one of Rawling's bodyguards as Mr. Apikiya tried to drive through an area where Rawlings' convoy had stopped. Local press initially reported the incident as an assault on the DCE by Rawlings himself, but the DCE later released a press statement clarifying his report. Investigations concerning the incident are ongoing.

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION ON LOGISTICS

10. (SBU) The Electoral Commission (EC) continues to train domestic and international election observers, distribute ballot papers and indelible ink throughout the country, and has released its final register to the political parties. Complaints about the EC's handling of the voter register have quieted down in the past two weeks. In response to concerns about poor turnout at the exhibition of the register, the EC has decided to accept voters who have valid voter ID cards and are on the poll book, a separate, more complete list than the register. Representatives of the EC have repeatedly told PolOffs that the register and all other logistics are in good order for December 7.

11. (C) On budget matters, however, the EC has not performed well. At a meeting with international donor partners in early November, the Deputy Commissioner of the EC said that if their budget did not have enough to sustain a run-off election, it would "go knocking on the door of the Finance Minister and ask for more money." At another donor meeting on November 30, the EC flatly admitted that it had not kept track of its incoming donor funds and its expenses and requested that donors provide the EC with the amounts they have donated and into which accounts.

COMMENT

12. (C) Ghana has shown it merits its democratic credentials in preparation for this election. The Electoral Commission had some difficulties with delays and the massive task of creating a new register with photos for 10 million voters. Despite these problems and its budget issues, we give the EC high marks for impartiality and it will likely pull off this election without too many hitches. The run-up to the election has been peaceful, with a few exceptions. Ghana's security agencies have created a National Election Task Force and have taken active measures to ensure election day is peaceful. Opposition parties have criticized the NPP for abusing incumbency, especially in the use of the media. A recent study by the Center for Democracy and Governance also argues that the NPP has had more access to the media than other parties. The NPP has been more aggressive in spreading patronage before this election. Nonetheless, opposition parties have also received widespread media coverage and have been actively campaigning in all parts of the country.

13. (C) For the most part, campaign rhetoric and debates have

been civil. Civil society groups have organized peace marches, prayers for peace, election education campaigns, and candidate debates, and are fielding around 10,000 domestic observers. While there will undoubtedly be reports of irregularities (and post will have 30 teams of observers deployed on polling day to watch the process, along with around 100 other foreign observers), the stage is set for substantially free and fair elections on December 7. The election should also be generally peaceful, with the possible exception of Tamale in the Northern District, and the ethnically and politically volatile town of Bawku in Upper East. End comment.

YATES